



Connecticut Department of Public Health

Testimony Presented Before the Committee on Aging Committee

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House Bill 6554, An Act Concerning Aging and COVID-19

The Department of Public Health (DPH) provides the following information in regard to House Bill 6554, which requires the Departments of Public Health, Aging and Disability Services and Social Services to study the impact of COVID-19 on senior citizens. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

The Department has concerns with the broad scope of the study and report outlined in this bill, which would include the “impact” of COVID-19 on senior citizens including, but not limited to, residents of nursing homes and managed residential communities. It is important to note that for purposes of this bill, DPH only has jurisdiction over nursing homes, and assisted living services that take place in a managed residential community setting. Some managed residential community settings do not offer assisted living services, and therefore do not fall under the purview of the Department.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, DPH completed over 3,000 infection control surveys in nursing homes and other long-term care facility settings. Information about the Department’s investigations during this timeframe is available to the public and can be found on the state’s [licensing website](#). DPH held weekly calls with nursing homes and assisted living services agencies to provide feedback and guidance on topics such as infection control, survey findings, personal protective equipment, cohorting, and testing. Additionally, the Department arranged for weekly testing of all nursing home staff and residents by assigning a testing partner that worked with each facility. DPH also facilitated the distribution of personal protection equipment and COVID test kits. Lastly, the Department’s epidemiologists were assigned to work with nursing home and assisted living infection prevention control specialists to help mitigate disease outbreaks.

In addition to the direct support the Department provided throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, staff from DPH also participated in the [Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group \(NHALOWG\)](#). This working group was convened in November of 2020 to review the effects of COVID-19 on nursing home and assisted living residents and to make recommendations to

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improve the COVID-19 response for long-term care residents, their families and front-line healthcare workers. The working group was divided into four subcommittees, as follows:

- Outbreak Response and Surveillance;
- Staffing Levels;
- Socialization, Visitation and Caregiver Engagement; and
- Infrastructure/Capital Improvement Funding.

Each of the four subcommittees, which included industry representatives, labor leaders, public health and elder care subject matter experts, and members of the public, met weekly for over two months to review several of the long-term recommendations from the [Mathematica Final Report](#), dated September 30, 2020, which was commissioned by Governor Lamont to evaluate the state's response to COVID-19 in Connecticut's nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The subcommittees also explored other topics and ideas focused on strengthening the state's long-term care system beyond the pandemic response. Each subcommittee submitted a report that included recommendations for proposed legislation for the 2021 session along with other recommendations that include regulatory and administrative revisions.

The requirements of this bill are duplicative of our past and current efforts. It is important to note that the Department will continue our survey and certification process and investigate any complaints in the long-term care facility setting, along with taking into consideration recommendations from the NHALOWG. DPH is still responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and our resources should be focused on the continued needs of the long-term care communities, rather than studying the impact and effects of the pandemic. Typically, at the end of a declared emergency, the impacted entities will review the responses to the emergency and report on opportunities for improvement in the event of a further public health emergency. The Department anticipates this taking place upon rescission of the public health emergency declaration. The Department respectfully requests that this bill not move forward.

Thank you for your consideration of this information. The Department is available to answer any questions you may have.